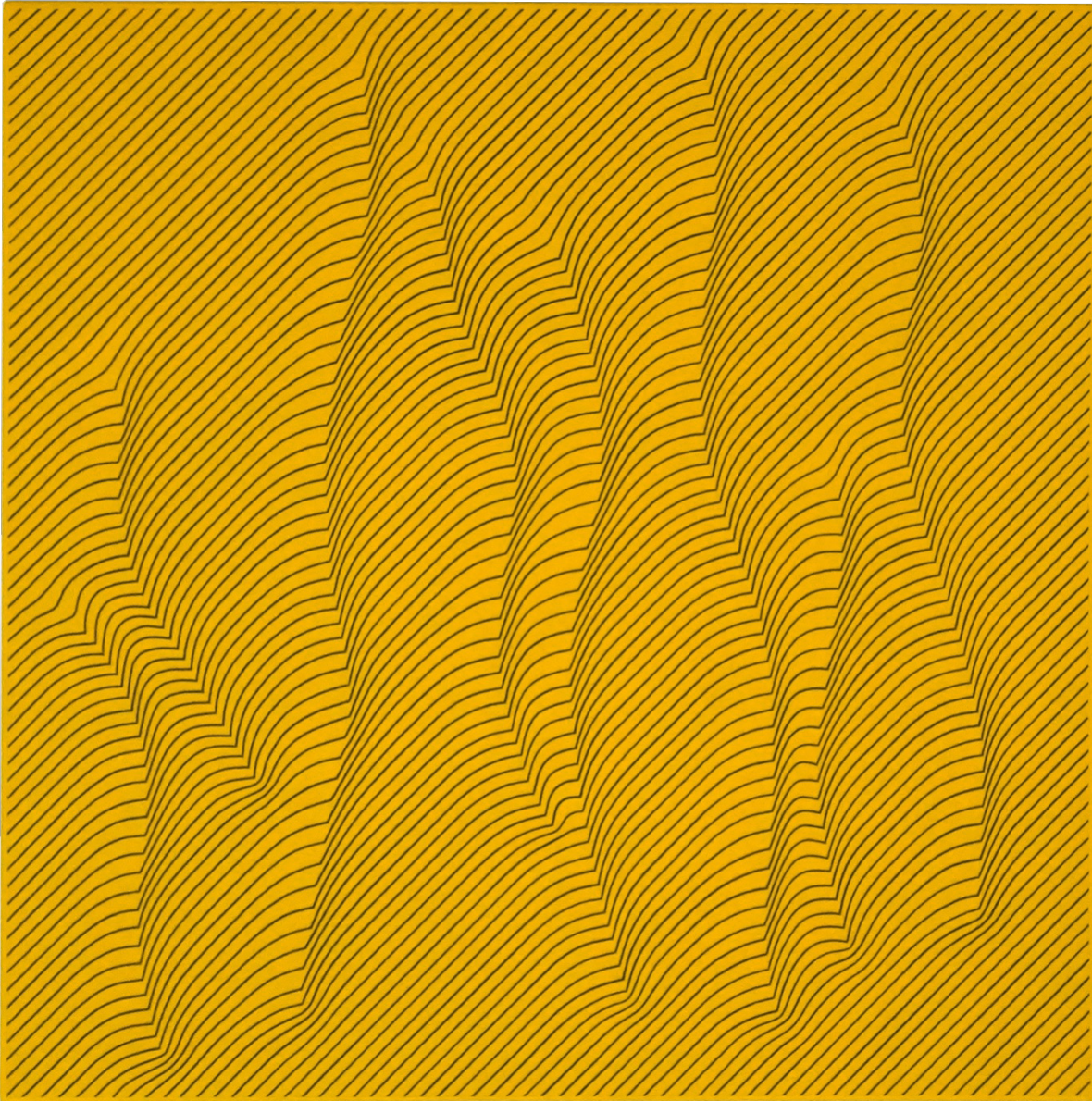


Julian Stanczak, *Warm Yellow*, 2014, 24x24"



Warm Yellow, 2014, 24 inches x 24 inches

It has been 10 years since Julian painted this little gem. His body was not as able to work on large paintings as it once had been, but his spirit was up for new adventures. When he started this new body of work exploring free-form curves, he said, laughing, "I am old enough now to be romantic!"

What did he mean by extolling this new-won freedom he afforded himself in his mature age? Julian felt freer than in youthful, stressful times when he was helping to raise a family and to

advance his work and name—that's for certain. As far as being "romantic," what he meant was that he felt free from self-imposed logic and the supremacy of mind over emotion. He allowed himself the luxury of acting on impulse, imagination, and intuition. Julian had been a stoic all his life....

In these new paintings, Julian used tape to create lines on the surface of prepared panels: here and there and everywhere as it felt right in the moment. There was composition, projection, and experience, naturally, but also immediacy and risk-taking. (Although ultimately consisting of paint, these can be thought of as "drawings"—as works consisting of lines drawn with tape—with each line drawn freehand.) One of the aims Julian set for himself in these works was the challenge to keep all of the diagonal lines not only unbroken from edge to edge but also remaining in equidistant intervals around all four edges. Not an easy task at all, especially if you want to keep the lineal dance performance captivating!

In this two-foot painting, Julian started his lines running from the top right-hand corner of the painting to the left-hand bottom corner. In Paul Klee's words: the line "went for a walk" as it progressed along the surface, or to give it an Australian twist, it went for a "walk about."

Before "drawing" with the tape, Stanczak painted several coats of purple over the whole panel. While that dried, he cut spools of 1/16th inch-thin tape, using the tape-cutting machine he invented. Once the paint had dried, Julian made white pencil marks, approximating where he intended the eight squiggly, undulating, vertical lines to perform their dance. Julian was always conscious to leave an equidistant border within which to contain the visual action.

Now Stanczak "drew" the undulations on the panel with the thin, flexible tape. In the approach to each vertical pencil line, he had to tighten/condense the negative space which created visually the darker condensations. On the downside of the line drawing, the space had to open up wider to meet the rhythm of the diagonal field. This sharp change of direction and the decreasing and increasing of the negative space, creates the visual crests and the undulation of the surface. Each of the ¼-inch marks around the painting's edge received its corresponding line without ever breaking the continuous run. An acrobatic feat of tape application!

After all the tape had been laid, Stanczak painted the entire panel with several coats of yellow paint. Once the yellow dried, he removed the tape, which allowed the purple color to show through, casting an unusual purple haze over the surface. Yellow and purple are complementary opposites and have a love-hate relationship, but because one color is light and the other dark in value, they do not vibrate but increase the individual colors' intensity/strength.



Detail of *Warm Yellow*

You need an exquisitely trained eye to keep the space between the crests even and sequential. The serial applications of crests and valleys soon form a system of dark edges on one side and lighter, wider-spaced waves along the pencil lines. We immediately form parallels to experiences from nature and interpret the wider-spaced areas as being hit by sunlight while the condensations are surmised as shadows. Since no shading is physically involved, the eye provides the effect of shading by creating an ephemeral purple haze on the ascending lines.

The visual effect of all this exacting application is that the entire painting surface begins to bulge and warp: it depresses and upheaves, wrinkles and stretches. Organic forms emerge and vanish; the whole surface appears to be three-dimensional and filled with life energy.

I am glad Julian experienced a certain mental freedom in his later years, not having to constantly defend his philosophy or his perceptual priority and feel free to experiment with new ways of activating and undulating the painted surface. It is not that Julian made the working process easier for himself—it is meticulous and repetitive—but the psychological freedom to be “romantic” or emotive, was gratifying. The stored-up abundance of ideas allowed him to keep inventing visual provocations and surprises—for himself and for those around him.

—Barbara Stanczak, February 2024